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JOHNSON REVEALS A 2,000-M.P.H. JET; SEES MAJOR GAINS

FIVE-YEAR SECRET

President Says Plane Has Commercial and Military Application

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 29—The United States has developed, in unusual secrecy, an advanced experimental jet airplane capable of flying more than 2,000 miles an hour in sustained flight and at an altitude of more than 70,000 feet.

President Johnson disclosed the secret at his news conference today and identified the plane as the A-11. He said its performance "far exceeds that of any other aircraft in the world today." [Opening statement, Page 44.]

The President cited both the military and commercial significance of the lessons learned in developing the plane. But the commercial application does not foreclose the need for a separate, independent project to build a supersonic commercial airliner, officials said afterward.

Officials refused to elaborate on the details of the secret project. A Government source said, however, that the current tests were designed to study the possibility of turning the A-11 into a longrange interceptor, presumably with missile launchers.

Developed by Lockheed

By comparison with the sustained speed of the A-11, at more than three times the speed of sound, such interceptors as the F-106 and the F-4C can attain speeds of about 1,600 miles an hour only over relatively short distances. At flight altitudes, the speed of sound is 660 miles an hour.

"The development of a supersonic commercial transport aircraft will also be greatly assisted by the lessons learned from this A-11 program," Mr. Johnson said.

The Lockheed Aircraft Corporation at Burbank, Calif., is the developer of the A-11, Mr. Johnson announced. Lockheed also developed the high-flying, glider-like U-2 reconnaissance plane.

A photograph of the new airplane revealed a long, rocket-like fuselage with the cockpit near the front and stabilizing wings and rudder back near the engine exhaust. The dimensions were not given, and Government officials even refused to say if the plane had more than one engine, something that was not clear from the photograph.

The President's announcement disclosed one of the best-kept secrets in aviation, or for that matter military affairs, in recent years. A quick search of available published materials indicated no references to the new high-speed, high-altitude aircraft.

The project was started in 1959, the President said. This was at the height of widespread public charges, during the Eisenhower Administration, that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union militarily, particularly in missiles.

Backed by Eisenhower

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, it is understood, personally pressed for the developmetn of the A-11 and President Kennedy, when he took office, displayed enthusiasm for it. According to one source, President Kennedy "regarded the A-11 as his baby."

President Johnson, a Senator from Texas at the time, was then head of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee and was presumably informed of the secret project. He said today that the appropriate members of Congress had been kept advised of the plane's development.

"The existence of this program is being disclosed today to permit the orderly exploitation of this advanced technology in our military and commercial programs," Mr. Johnson told his news conference.

But after disclosing some information, he said:

"In view of the continuing importance of these developments to our national security, the detailed performance of the A-11 will remain strictly classified.

"And all individuals associated with the program have been directed to refrain from making any further disclosure concerning this program."

Like the U-2, the early models of which had a J-57 aircraft engine, the A-11 has a J-58 engine, designed and built by the same manufacturer, the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Division of the United Aircraft Corporation.

This reinforced the belief that the A-11, which Government officials said had been "flying for some time," was a "follow-on55 version of the U-2. There were also indications that some Government officials were discontented over the disclosure of the existence of the A-11.

A Government official said, in response to questions, that the A-11 "has potential reconnaissance capability, as does any high-performance aircraft."

The U-2, which is understood to have attained heights of 90,000 feet, has a cruising speed of 460 miles an hour and a top speed of about 500 miles an hour. Height rather than speed has been important to its reconnaissance missions.

The existence of the U-2 as an airplane was made known long before its reconnaissance missions over the Soviet Union were disclosed with the downing of a plane flown by Francis Gary Powers on May 1, 1960. The U-2 was also used in high-altitude tests to determine the extent of nuclear radiation after bomb tests, and for weather observations.

The presumption that the new plane would have missiles, if developed for military operations, was based on the President's noting that the "air-to-air missile system for the A-11" and the experimental fire-control system had been developed by the Hughes Aircraft Company.

Report to Be Rele[illegible]

Government officials stressed that the president, in mentioning the A-11's commercial significance, had been speaking chiefly of the detailed technical advances. The plane itself could not be turned into a commercial transport, they said.

Najeeb E. Halaby, administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency, and other officials concerned with the supersonic transport-project have been kept informed of the progress of the A-11, it was said.

The President announced that he would release Monday a report by Eugene R. Black and Stanley de J. Osborne on the supersonic transport program.

The report, Mr. Johnson said, "makes a number of recommendations dealing with the financial aspects of the supersonic transport program" that had been referred to various Government officials for comment.

Discussing the A-11, Mr. Johnson said that its development was made possible by major advances in aircraft technology. One of the most important, he said, "has been the mastery of the metallurgy and fabrication of titanium metal which is required for the high temperatures experienced by aircraft traveling at more than three times the speed of sound."

The fact that the higher speeds attained by new planes could virtually melt the metals now in use has been a troublesome factor in attempts to develop the B-70 bomber. It was a key issue in the controversy over the TFX (tactical fighter, experimental) warplane contract.

In the TFX controversy, the Defense Department rejected a proposal by one contractor to use titanium. Defense officials said that the use of titanium for the new high-speed fighter plane, now designated the F-111, would involve high development risks.

Use of Metal Is Different

In answer to questions today, Government sources said that "it was specifically because of technological information obtained in the A-11 program that it was possible to evaluate the problem and to draw that conclusion."

Government sources insisted that the use of titanium in the TFX was wrong, even if it had proved right in the A-11, because the proposed use was different.

Government sources were also asked to explain why the Air Force had demanded funds for a new improved manned interceptor when its high officials presumably knew of the existence of the A-11. The House authorized $60 million for such a plane last week despite the refusal of the Administration to request the money.

Government sources said only that the use of their knowledge of the A-11 [illegible] had resisted the Air Force proposals.